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Ministry of Education

BURNABY OPENS STRONGSTART EARLY LEARNING CENTRE

BURNABY – MLAs Harry Bloy and John Nuraney joined parents, preschoolers and school district officials today to officially open a StrongStart early learning centre at Edmonds Community elementary school.

"StrongStart centres are for parents and caregivers who want to give their preschool-age children the chance to become comfortable in a school setting," said Nuraney, MLA for Burnaby-Willingdon. "This early learning centre will help local youngsters grow the skills and confidence to successfully learn, both now and when they start school."

The centre takes advantage of underutilized space in Edmonds Community elementary school. Many schools across B.C. have excess space as a result of declining enrolment. Since 2001, enrolment has decreased by 42,500 students provincewide. Like the School Community Connections program that provides community access to existing underutilized school space, StrongStart centres turn the challenge of declining enrolment into an opportunity.

"This government is committed to making our province the best-educated, most literate one around, and that requires we encourage a love of learning and reading in all B.C. students right from the start," said Bloy, MLA for Burquitlam.

The StrongStart centre will offer a free drop-in program for parents or caregivers and their children. A qualified early childhood educator will lead activities, including stories, music and art, to help children grow linguistically, physically and socially, and become comfortable in a school-like environment.

"Burnaby is a leader in early learning, with a solid understanding that when schools get involved in the early years, everyone benefits," said Burnaby North MLA Richard T. Lee. "This centre will help parents support their preschoolers, providing them with every opportunity to enter the school system ready for success."

This Burnaby StrongStart Centre was awarded $50,000 to prepare its in-school space and fund its first year of operating costs, including staff and supplies and healthy snacks. The centre will receive another $30,000 for its second year of operation. An additional $10,000 will fund an evaluation of the program.

"Nearly one out of four B.C. kindergarten students is not developmentally ready to start school, so we need to address that," said Education Minister Shirley Bond. "StrongStart early learning centres are located in schools with underutilized space and are part of our plan to improve literacy skills so that B.C. children have the best possible start in school and in life."

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The StrongStart centre in Edmonds Community elementary school is part of the first phase of the StrongStart centre program, which includes 16 sites and a government investment of over $1.4 million. Last month, Premier Gordon Campbell unveiled the $27-million first phase of ReadNow BC, government's new literacy plan, which promised more StrongStart centres around the province and increased government's investment to $5 million. StrongStart centres fulfil a 2005 election promise and a throne speech commitment to use underutilized school spaces as centres to deliver early learning services.

"The Burnaby School District would like to recognize and celebrate the funding provided by the Ministry of Education for the start up of the Edmonds StrongStart Centre," said Diana Mumford, vice chair of the Burnaby school board. "We look forward to the opportunity to continue to provide this exciting connection to our community of early learners."

The Province is committed to reaching its goal of making B.C. the best-educated, most literate jurisdiction on the continent. Since 2001, government has invested over $106 million in new literacy initiatives, including pre-literacy and early learning programs such as $12 million in grants to support early learning initiatives, $9.5 million to operate the kindergarten readiness program Ready, Set, Learn, and $2.7-million for the ActNow Literacy Education Activity and Play (LEAP BC) program that encourages literacy, physical activity and healthy eating in preschool-aged children.

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